



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

A discussion on what is a qualified teacher of pupils with visual impairment

Citation for published version:

Ravenscroft, J 2015, 'A discussion on what is a qualified teacher of pupils with visual impairment', *British Journal of Visual Impairment*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 161-166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0264619615603287>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1177/0264619615603287](https://doi.org/10.1177/0264619615603287)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

British Journal of Visual Impairment

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



A Discussion on What is a Qualified Teacher of Pupils with Visual Impairment (QTVI)

Welcome to this international mix of papers for the September issue of 2015. If you will allow me to change the editorial style for this issue and instead of discussing the very interesting papers this issue contains, I would like to detail the discussion I had in June this year with a visiting PhD student from America. This discussion was around the area of competences and what exactly should the education and learning be for a QTVI. These were extremely interesting discussions and I thought I would put some of the debates we had over the four weeks in this editorial.

The uneven relationship between teacher supply and demand is something we hear all the time in our work place and amongst our colleagues, in the field of special education, and especially in the area of vision impairment. We constantly ask ourselves *what is going to happen when we retire? Where are the younger teachers who are suitably qualified in vision impairment to take over our caseload?* Questions like this reverberate around teachers' staff rooms. Boe (2006) and colleagues (Boe & Cook, 2006; Boe, Cook & Sunderland, 2005) have written extensively about the long term trends and the shortage of special education teachers in America, suggesting that there may be a shortfall of around 54,000 special education teachers for students aged between 6 and 21 years of age (Boe, 2006). Certainly at Heads of Service meetings held at the Scottish Sensory Centre (SSC), discussions around qualifications, competences, staffing and workload are common themes on the agenda. So let's have a little look at how you can become a qualified teacher of pupils with visual impairment in Scotland.

Current routes to becoming a qualified teacher of pupils with visual impaired in Scotland

The Requirement for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations 2005 states that all teachers must be registered with the General Teaching Council (Scotland) as defined by the Requirements. The regulations also require that where an education authority employs a teacher wholly or mainly to teach pupils who are visually impaired then that teacher should possess an appropriate qualification to teach such pupils. In other words, it is mandatory that these teachers must hold an appropriate qualification in vision impairment to teach pupils with vision impairment.

Definition of Terms

It was important in our discussions for me to define these terms at this early stage.

Wholly and mainly

The Scottish Government has made it compulsory for teachers that teach either exclusively pupils with a vision impairment or, in the case where pupils with a vision impairment make up the majority of the teacher's classroom/caseload, then that teacher must obtain an additional mandatory qualification in vision impairment. So, not only is it necessary for all teachers who work in schools for special purposes (special schools) that have a majority of children with vision impairment to hold an appropriate qualification, but this also applies to all peripatetic teachers that work 'wholly or mainly' with pupils with a vision impairment.

This requirement is also applicable to those teachers teaching deaf and hearing impaired pupils and as such has led to some interesting possibilities. In some local authorities in Scotland there are a few

peripatetic teachers that have both deaf and visually impaired children on their caseload. The number of pupils on their caseload may be equally split between the two sensory impairments, and consequently a debate has occurred between which additional qualification should these teachers obtain in order to meet the statutory demand.

Should the teachers of pupils with VI hold an additional mandatory qualification was the focus of several afternoon discussions. 'Yes' was the agreed position, and both of us thought that specialist input is needed and that specialist input should come from an additionally qualified QTVI.

Appropriate Qualification

So we had agreed at least on one thing, that an additional qualification was needed. The question that now confronted us was, 'what is an appropriate qualification?'

In Scotland an appropriate qualification is defined in terms of specific competences, which comprise the specialist knowledge, understanding and skills required of teachers to enable them to teach pupils who are visually impaired. In other words, it is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that all teachers who are employed wholly or mainly to teach pupils who are visually impaired are able to demonstrate the specific competences required to meet the needs of their pupil population. Consequently, an appropriate qualification is defined as:

- (a) knowledge, understanding and skills of a generic or core nature which will provide a sound foundation for teachers to work with children and young person with additional support needs and;
- (b) additional, specialised knowledge, understanding and skills to enable teachers to operate as effective teachers of pupils who have a hearing impairment, or visual impairment, or both hearing and visual impairment.

(Scottish Government, 2007, p. 4)

By allowing teachers to demonstrate competency, and, therefore an appropriate qualification, it is apparent that the Scottish Government is acknowledging that not all training routes will necessarily lead to a postgraduate diploma. It is this change in the definition of what is an appropriate qualification from a postgraduate diploma/masters degree to a competence-based framework that has opened up the range of possible pathways to become a qualified teacher of the visually impaired (QTVI). The debate I had with the PhD student was over whether this a progressive way of ensuring teacher numbers and the support of children with VI in schools are met or is this a start of a 'slippery slope' where the qualification of teachers of pupils with visual impairment (QTVI) are not quality assured by a higher education establishment but internally by the local authority themselves. The debate continues and I would be interested in hearing from yourselves if in fact similar debates are happening.

There are safeguards though in that local authorities that choose to concentrate on accrediting experiential learning and 'in house' training to ensure that their teachers are appropriately qualified, rather than through the postgraduate diploma courses offered by higher educational institutions must be able to demonstrate that these qualifications are quality assured. The Scottish Government has outlined a mechanism to ensure that the quality standard of qualified teachers of the visually impaired is still maintained.

Independent Inspection

One mechanism that ensures standards are maintained is through the school inspection process that is delivered by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). The inspection process seeks to assure stakeholders and support improvement in the education system. Part of the inspection process by HMIE is to examine the quality assurance arrangements developed by the local authority and to assess whether these arrangements comply with the teacher's ability to demonstrate the additional competences that have been specified in the guidance. In theory the local authority has responsibility for employing appropriately qualified teachers; if a teacher who is teaching pupils wholly or mainly with vision impairments but does not have the required competences then that local authority will fail that particular part of the inspection and will be required to send the failing teacher on additional training programmes until the competence standard is reached. However, inspection of these qualifications has been a recent matter of debate within the Education and Culture Committee of the Scottish Parliament (<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9951>)

Another requirement that has been laid down by the Scottish Government is Regulation 8 of The Requirements for Teachers (Scotland) 2005. This particular regulation states that

“A teacher who does not possess a qualification (.....) may be employed by an education authority wholly or mainly to teach pupils who are hearing impaired, visually impaired or both hearing and visually impaired, if the education authority are satisfied that the teacher is in the process of obtaining a qualification (.....) provided that the aggregate period for which the teacher wholly or mainly teaches pupils who are hearing impaired, vision impaired or both hearing and vision impaired does not exceed five years.” (Scottish Statutory Instrument 2005 No. 355: The Requirements for Teachers (Scotland), 2005).

By having this five-year rule, any teacher who has not met the competences required within this period, must not then be employed by the local authority as a teacher of visually impaired pupils. This legislation ensures that visually impaired children are not being taught by teachers who are unable to demonstrate that they have the necessary competences required to meet the needs of these pupils. Again whether this has actually occurred has been debated in the Education and Culture Committee of the Scottish Parliament (<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9951>)

Braille

Another safeguard imposed by the Scottish Government is the requirement that all teachers of the visually impaired must be able to demonstrate the ability to use and teach alternative reading and writing systems including Braille Grade 1. It is no longer a requirement for all teachers of the visually impaired to successfully demonstrate competence in Braille to Grade 2. However, local authorities must ensure that if a pupil requires to use Grade 2 Braille then that pupil must be taught by a teacher who is able to demonstrate competence in Braille to Grade 2. All of this is quite interesting as we have now moved over to Unified English Braille (UEB).

Breadth of Experience

I informed my visitor that teachers working with visually impaired pupils must be able to demonstrate that they have experience and knowledge coupled with the understanding and skills of working in contexts other than with the children and young people they normally teach to fulfil the requirements of the mandatory qualification. This requirement ensures that teachers gain a broad knowledge base of working with different kinds of pupils with visual impairments so that the teacher is able to demonstrate competence to work with visually impaired pupils including those with a single disability as well as visually impaired pupils who have an additional disability or complex needs.

So currently the competences that QTVIs must obtain in Scotland are;

Assessment

- a critical knowledge of different types of assessment and terminologies, and an ability to observe and assess the functional use of vision by visually impaired learners;
- an ability to carry out a range of appropriate assessments, and to interpret, discuss and use assessments effectively, applying them to the curriculum and to skills of daily living;
- an understanding that most standard assessment tools are not designed or standardised to take account of the developmental needs of young learners with a visual impairment and that, given the low incidence nature of visual impairment and subsequent standardisation difficulties, all assessments should be regarded as guides requiring interpretation taking account of the circumstances of the individual learner.

Multi-agency/partnership working

- an ability to plan, develop and evaluate their strategies for working with parents/carers, teachers and multidisciplinary teams in support of visually impaired learners.

Language and communication

- an understanding of the range of specialised approaches to the development of functional and pre-linguistic communication for visually impaired learners (e.g. behaviour as communication, intensive interaction, vocalisation, personal gesture, experiential signifiers, objects of reference etc.); linguistic systems (e.g. speech related to experience, on body signing etc.) and an overview of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems (e.g. speech output communication aids, Braille, Moon, etc).

Medical/disability related knowledge

- a familiarity with the effects of a range of ocular and cerebral visual impairments, genetic and acquired, and with the range of disability and needs associated with the present population of young learners with a visual impairment and the resulting implications for learning and development, including early movement and development, safety and health;
- a knowledge of, and ability to use effectively, the orientation and mobility techniques for both able-bodied and wheelchair using children and young people with a visual impairment;
- a knowledge of the impact on learning of specific medical conditions, syndromes and disabilities which can be associated with visual impairment;
- an understanding of the specific needs and issues which can arise with visually impaired pupils at transitions to and from different stages of education and experience.

Specialised technology

- a knowledge of the developing range of alternative forms of accessible media, specialised communications hardware and software and teaching strategies to utilize these alternative forms of media, specialised communication hardware and software;
- a knowledge of low vision aids and their use;
- a critical knowledge of and ability to use a range of ICT and, as appropriate, low and high technology augmentative communication approaches to facilitate access to the curriculum and life long learning.

Specific legislation and policy

- an ability to reflect on the effectiveness of their practice in different contexts and roles, and the level of their awareness of appropriate practices for learners with visual impairment from ages 0-18 years, in the context of current legislation, policies and advice for education and access, and local and national support provision.

Teaching and learning

- an understanding of how children with visual impairment learn, including the impact of visual impairment and other disabilities on language and communication, access to information and mobility and movement, and the significance of these for curriculum development and teaching approaches;
- an understanding of the range of barriers visually impaired learners face in accessing the curriculum, and of strategies for enabling access and support within different contexts;
- an ability to identify, design, adapt and evaluate appropriate materials and environmental conditions to meet the needs of the full range of children and young people with a visual impairment, including those with other additional support needs;
- an ability to use and teach alternative reading and writing systems including Braille Grade 1 and Moon;
- an understanding that to teach Grade 2 Braille, which is the standard for Braille users, teachers will be required to upgrade their skills to include a competence to teach Grade 2 Braille.

(From Scottish Government 2007 <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2007/01/29163203/3>)

From this list of competences our discussions took several turns but the upshot of our discussions centred around whether these competences are sufficient or even necessary for a QTVI. Certainly we took evidence from England where in September 2014 a new and revised criteria was published (See Annex A in the PDF)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/430092/VI_Template_FINAL.pdf.

We also looked at the evidence from the (Californian) revised Guidelines for Programs Serving Students with Visual Impairments 2014 Revised Edition. And we wondered why differences between these three documents of competences existed and we started to examine what does a QTVI actually mean in each country and could we actually get a unified agreement on what is a QTVI.

Unfortunately, (or probably fortunately for the PhD student) she had to return to the US before we concluded this but the following questions for me remain;

What are the competences needed (in 2015) for a QTVI?

Are the Scottish Competences sufficient?

Could we agree across different countries as to what a QTVI is or are there such country specific differences that agreement is actually neither important nor necessary?

If you would like to pass any comments or thoughts on the questions raised I would be delighted to hear from you and would gladly follow this up in a later editorial.

Enjoy this issue.

John Ravenscroft

Editor in Chief.

References

Boe, E.E 2006, 'Long-term trends in the national demand, supply and shortage of special education teachers', *Journal of Special Education*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp.138-150.

Boe, E.E & Cook, L.H 2006, 'The chronic and increasing shortage of fully-certified teachers in special and general education', *Exceptional Children*, vol. 72, no.4, pp. 443-460.

Boe, E.E, Cook, L.H & Sunderland 2005, 'Turnover of specific education teachers: New research on the extent and impact of exit attrition, transfer to general education, and school transfer, paper', paper presented at the 2005 OSEP Project Directors Conference, Washington, DC.

National College for Teaching and Leadership (2015). Specification for Mandatory Qualifications. For specialist teachers of children and young people with vision impairments. Retrieved Aug 7th 2015 from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/430092/VI_Template_FINAL.pdf

Scottish Executive Education Department, Support for Learning Division, 2007, '*Guidance on appropriate qualifications for teachers of children and young persons who are hearing impaired, visually impaired, or both hearing and visually impaired.*' Retrieved 27th Aug 7th 2015 from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/01/29163203/0>

Scottish Government, 2005, 'The Requirements for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations 2005,' *Scottish Statutory Instrument 2005, No.355*. ISBN 0110696484.

The Requirements for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations 2005. Retrieved Aug 7th 2015 from <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/ssi2005/20050355.htm>